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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7324
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1013
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4564
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8104
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5665
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1424
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000213

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DEPT FOR P, EAP/MLS, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMESE FOREIGN MINISTER SEEKS SOMETHING FOR
NOTHING

Classified By: CDA SVillarosa for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Foreign Minister Nyan Win finally agreed to meet with Charge on March 18 after several months of requests. When Charge asked about plans to ensure the credibility of the upcoming referendum, the Foreign Minister used the opportunity to complain again about economic sanctions, claiming that poor nations needed to develop economically before becoming democracies. He downplayed the utility of dialogue to garner broader public support for the political way forward on the grounds that once Burmese minds are made up, they do not change. He claimed Aung San Suu Kyi made up her mind nine years ago. Asked about the prospects for additional visits by UN Envoy Gambari, the Foreign Minister said that another would have to wait until after the May referendum. The Foreign Minister reacted positively to Charge's suggestion that copies of the proposed Constitution, which he said had been published, be sent to diplomatic missions. Charge also mentioned our concerns about aviation safety and requested the Foreign Minister's assistance in arranging a meeting with the Minister of Transportation. He also agreed to recommend that the Culture Minister, reportedly close to Than Shwe, meet with Charge.

Lift Sanctions, But No Dialogue and No Compromise

¶2. (C) Charge met Foreign Minister Nyan Win in Nay Pyi Taw on March 18, and suggested that it would be useful to meet more often. (We last met last July.) He replied that he would welcome more discussion if it "was constructive, not destructive." Charge responded that while we disagreed on many issues, the U.S. always tried to offer constructive recommendations. Burmese "do not react well to pressure," asserted the Foreign Minister, launching into familiar complaints about economic sanctions. He said we should lift the sanctions because "only prosperous countries can be democracies," citing Asian and African history. Charge noted that many poor countries have made transitions to democracy in the past two decades, and the USG had been very generous in supporting fragile democracies because we understood how difficult it was. She urged Burma get started now. He then complained that we provided no humanitarian assistance. When Charge pointed out that we did, he dismissed it as a fraction of what we spend in Iraq.

13. (C) Charge asked whether the senior leaders were still pursuing a dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic leaders in order to develop broader support for their roadmap. Burmese are reluctant to change their minds, the Foreign Minister replied, claiming that ASSK made her mind up nine years ago when the leaders tried to talk with her then. Charge said that only through continuous dialogue would it be possible to find areas of common agreement that could offer a way forward. She noted that the 88 Generation Students had said they could live with 90% of the proposed constitution. Democracy works through compromise, she continued, and developing broader agreement about the way forward would be possible if all parties were willing to compromise. The Foreign Minister suggested we tell the National League for Democracy (NLD) leaders to compromise. Charge replied that we cannot tell them what to do anymore than we can tell the senior generals. However, she expected NLD would compromise if they saw some signs of compromise by the military.

14. (C) The Foreign Minister returned to sanctions, saying they should all be removed. Charge explained that it was not realistic to expect that they could be lifted at once, noting that many had been imposed by Congress. She added that sanctions had strong bipartisan support, and did not expect our elections in November would change the situation any. More realistic would be a gradual lifting of sanctions as Burma made concrete progress on dialogue and national reconciliation; they would eventually all be lifted as Burma continued to move towards a democratic transition. She noted that many constructive suggestions had been made on how to move forward on the referendum and the roadmap, but it appeared that the senior leaders had rejected them all.

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Charge suggested that removing the criminal penalties for criticizing the draft constitution and permitting an open debate would be a good first step that the international community would welcome.

Getting Ready for the Referendum

15. (C) Charge asked if UN Envoy Gambari would be returning to Burma anytime soon. After saying that he had received no request for another visit, the Foreign Minister said one would not be possible until June after the referendum. Charge asked if that meant the referendum would take place in late May. He only offered that the date might be announced by the end of April. He volunteered that the constitution would not be approved with 100% of the votes, and acknowledged that "some" would vote no. Charge asked if it would be possible to talk with someone regarding the referendum procedures. He said that the national referendum commission was already busy instructing the regional commissions on the procedures. Charge suggested that the members of the commission brief the diplomatic community when they come to Rangoon. The Foreign Minister said there would be too many questions, and most embassies would not be interested. Charge said she could guarantee a strong turnout from all the embassies. After he acknowledged seeing a copy of the draft constitution, Charge recommended that it be distributed to all the embassies, which he agreed to arrange.

16. (C) Charge closed the meeting by requesting the Foreign Minister's assistance with arranging meetings with the Culture Minister, the member of the "spokes authoritative team" reportedly closest to Than Shwe, and the Transport Minister. She mentioned our serious concerns about aviation safety based on reports we had received after the Air Bagan crash. He agreed to assist.

17. (C) Comment: Many people tell us the Foreign Minister understands the need to be more responsive to international requests for information and suggestions, but his is not the

voice Than Shwe listens to. He seems willing to be of assistance on small things, like distributing the constitution and recommending other meetings, but he has no influence on big issues, like putting measures into place to ensure a credible referendum. He seemed resigned to have to defend an outcome that he already knows few in the international community will find credible. The incessant drumbeat on sanctions sounds to us like the most recent must be hurting. But no one, including the Foreign Minister, is willing to tell Than Shwe what needs to be done. Nor have they told him that a non-fair and non-free referendum will not make the sanctions go away. Than Shwe seems to think he can be the demandeur because no one has told him differently.

VILLAROSA